IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1, 14, 15 and 18 without prejudice to treatment in a continuing application.

Please amend claims 2, 8, 11 and 13 as set forth below.

A complete listing of the claims and their current status follows:

1. (Cancelled)

2. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim ~~1~~ 8, wherein said stationary transfer surface includes a number of elongated beams extending between the first conveyor section and the second conveyor section.

3. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein each of said number of elongated beams includes an upper surface defining said stationary transfer surface.

4. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said extension fork assembly includes a plurality of elongated beams and a plurality of elongated forks interleaved with said plurality of elongated beams.

5. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein each of said plurality of elongated beams includes an upper surface defining said stationary transfer surface

6. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein each of said plurality of elongated forks includes an upper surface configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross.

7. (Previously Amended The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said upper surface of each of said plurality of elongated forks is situated at or below said stationary transfer surface.

8. (Currently Amended) An ~~The~~ apparatus ~~according to claim 1~~ for loading an article from a first conveyor section onto a pallet situated on a second conveyor section, comprising:

a pusher mechanism for pushing the article from the first conveyor section toward the pallet on the second conveyor section; and

an extension fork assembly including;

a stationary transfer surface between the first conveyor section and the second conveyor section configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross;

a number of elongated forks configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross; and

a drive mechanism connected to said number of forks and operable to move said number of forks between a retracted position adjacent said stationary transfer surface and an extended position adjacent the pallet on the second conveyor section,

wherein said extension fork assembly includes means for supporting a free end of each of said number of elongated forks, and said drive mechanism is connected to each of said number of forks at an opposite end thereof.

9. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said extension fork assembly includes: at least one guide channel disposed between said pusher mechanism and the second conveyor section; and at least one trolley assembly connecting said opposite end of said number of elongated forks to said drive mechanism and translatably disposed within a corresponding guide channel.

10. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein said at least one trolley assembly includes a substantially vertical roller and a substantially horizontal roller arranged for rolling engagement with said corresponding guide channel.

11. (Currently Amended) An ~~The~~ apparatus ~~according to claim 1~~ for loading an article from a first conveyor section onto a pallet situated on a second conveyor section, comprising:

a pusher mechanism for pushing the article from the first conveyor section toward the pallet on the second conveyor section; and

an extension fork assembly including;

a stationary transfer surface between the first conveyor section and the second conveyor section configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross;

a number of elongated forks configured to support the article as it is pushed by said pusher mechanism thereacross; and

a drive mechanism connected to said number of forks and operable to move said number of forks between a retracted position adjacent said stationary transfer surface and an extended position adjacent the pallet on the second conveyor section,

wherein said drive mechanism includes: at least one lead screw; a drive nut threadedly engaged on said lead screw and connected to said number of forks; and a motor operably coupled to said lead screw for rotating said at least one lead screw, whereby rotation of said lead screw causes said drive nut to traverse the length of said lead screw to move said number of elongated forks between said retracted and extended positions.

12. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said drive mechanism includes; two lead screws disposed apart from each other in parallel arrangement and each operably coupled to said motor; and two drive nuts, one each threadedly engaged with a corresponding one of said two lead screws, each of said drive nuts connected to said number of forks.

13. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim ~~1~~ 8, wherein each of said number of elongated forks includes a tapered free end.

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said upper surface of said number of elongated beams is curved.

17. (Previously Presented) The apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said upper surface of said number of elongated beams is curved.

18. (Cancelled)